



THE Marjoribanks LETTER

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The Marjoribanks Society



031 556 1189

The first issue of the Marjoribanks Letter seems to have been a great success. It has been gratifying to hear from kinsmen and kinswomen in so many parts of the world, and to learn from them more about some of my own ancestors who left Scotland so many years ago.

Many of the articles in this second issue, recounting the lives of other members of the Family, are based on information provided by readers.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Letter has started a network of communication among members of the family around the globe. As one kinswoman says, it is "strengthening our roots and our family ties."

Long may it continue.

I was particularly pleased to hear that so many of you are enthusiastic about my proposal to inaugurate a Marjoribanks Society, as a way of preserving our family connections.

With that encouragement, I have arranged to convene a meeting of all Marjoribankses to bring the Society into being. It will be held on Saturday, June 4, 1988, at 3:00 P.M., in Edinburgh at the Royal Abbey Hotel, No. 4, Carlton Terrace.

This is an invitation to all members of the Family to come to Scotland and help us to decide how the Society should be organized and what its objectives should be.

For those of us who live in Scotland, or elsewhere in Britain, it will be a relatively simple matter to visit Edinburgh for a day or two. There may even be other, more affluent, members of the Family, in distant parts, who will think nothing of jetting in to Edinburgh for the week-end.

For most of you, in the far corners of the old Empire, however, a voyage to Scotland to attend a meeting is not something to be undertaken lightly. But, if you have been thinking for a while about taking a holiday in the Old Country, this would be an excellent year to do it!

If you are coming, it would be helpful in making arrangements, if you would drop me a line, or fill out the form enclosed with this issue of the Letter.

However you can manage it, I hope you will come, and bring with you as many members of your own family as you can.

I'm looking forward to meeting you all, in Edinburgh.

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A Growing Family

We have now identified 111 Marjoribanks households in different parts of the world. Assuming normal fecundity — and there is no reason to doubt it — that would amount to more than 300 members of our Family.

There are undoubtedly many more still to be heard from.

Most of the Marjoribanks households we have identified so far are — not surprisingly — in Britain: 24 in Scotland, 25 in England. There are 36 in Australia and 12 in New Zealand.

(Mr. Andrew Marjoribanks, of Amangrove, New South Wales, sent a page from the telephone directory of Newcastle, N.S.W., a town of some 100,000 people, which lists 24 Marjoribanks households — "the largest concentration of the name I have come across anywhere in my travels.")

There are nine Marjoribanks households that we know of in Canada, but we could find only three in the United States.

The Johnstones

There is an historic connection between the Marjoribanks and the Johnstone families that goes back to at least the 16th century — although the exact nature of the connection seems to be lost in the mists of time.

There is little likelihood that it will ever be sorted out, but it is known that Marjoribanks lands in Annandale were at one time occupied by Johnstones who subsequently adopted the name of the property and called themselves Marjoribanks.

Which lands were occupied, under what circumstances, and whether all Marjoribankses were at one time Johnstones, has been the subject of intense research but results are far from conclusive.

Nevertheless, there has always been a feeling of kinship between the two families and some Marjoribankses — lacking a tartan of their own — have taken to wearing the Johnstone kilt, whenever they have felt the need to advertise their Scottishness.

If that right was ever in doubt, it has now been generously resolved by the Chief of the Johnstone Clan.

In a letter to Will Marjoribanks of That Ilk, the Right Honourable, the Earl of Annandale and Hartfell, says:

"I am very pleased to give approval for all members of your Name to wear the Johnstone Tartan."

An American Marjoribanks

One of the earliest members of the Family to arrive in North America must have been George Marjoribanks, who was banished to Virginia after taking part in The Fifteen, the battle against the English throne mounted in 1715 by James Edward Stewart, father of Prince Charles Edward, Bonnie Prince Charlie.

George Marjoribanks was an ancestor of William P. Jackson, an attorney, who now lives in McLean, Virginia. Some time after arriving in Virginia, Mr. Marjoribanks changed the spelling of his name to Marchbanks.

Mr. Jackson is the great-great-grandson of Lucinda Marchbanks, who lived from 1820 to 1892 and was the great-great-granddaughter of the George Marjoribanks who fought in The Fifteen.

"Strange to ear and eye alike"

The Reverend Thomas Marjoribanks of That Ilk, D.D., father of Will Marjoribanks of That Ilk, compiled a history of his family a few years before his death in 1946. Here are some extracts from that manuscript:

MARJORIBANKS is a Scottish family surname of considerable antiquity.

It is a name strange to ear and eye alike: difficult to pronounce and still more difficult to spell. Probably the most correct as well as the most euphonious pronunciation is as written above, so long as the accent is placed on the first syllable and not on the second.

This, however, is usually felt to be somewhat ponderous, and most bearers of the name prefer to render it "Marchbanks". From outside the family one hears all sorts of attempts: 'Majoribanks', 'Marshbanks' and even 'Majöribanks'.

But the vagaries of pronunciation are small compared with those of orthography. The writer has in his possession a genuine collection of envelopes, telegrams, and other missives addressed to himself and members of his family in which the name is spelt in over 350 different ways. This sounds almost incredible, but he is prepared to furnish the evidence if desired.

* * *

As is the case with many other private families, few records remain of the early history and intermarriages of the house of Marjoribanks; but several of its descendants are mentioned in the Histories of Scotland as members of the Scottish Parliaments.

There is evidence that as early as 1486 the family had property in Dumfriesshire bearing their name, for the Register of the Great Seal records a deed of that year witnessed by 'Philippus de Marjoribanks de eodem*', and among other witnesses to the same deed (all Dumfriesshire men) is 'Will. Johnstone de Marjoribanks'.

The first member of the family known to have achieved distinction is Thomas Marjoribanks, who flourished in the earlier part of the sixteenth century, and from whom both the Balbairdie and the Lees families have been wont to trace their descent.

At the institution of the College of Justice he was one of the few Advocates selected to 'procure' before the Lords. On 2nd March 1535 he was appointed Advocate for the poor.

He had a charter of the lands of Ratho 'in the county of Renfrew' in 1540, of Spotts in 1543, and of the lands of Marjoribanks in Annandale in 1556.

* of That Ilk

Bathgate Celebration

In Bathgate, in West Lothian, every year in June, they celebrate the wedding, in 1315, of Lady Marjorie Bruce and Walter Stewart.

As part of her dowry, Lady Marjorie received the castle and lands of Bathgate, as well as the lands in Annandale which became known as *Terre de Marjorie Bankis*, and gave rise to our family name.

Andrew J. Marjoribanks of Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, England, who grew up in Bathgate, sends a booklet describing the celebration:

"Each year children from local schools re-enact the marriage with all the colour, pomp and pageantry of the times vividly portrayed in a ceremony that takes over the town's streets for a day."

One of the town's streets, incidentally, is named Marjoribanks after one of Bathgate's notable benefactors. William Marjoribanks of Whitburn, West Lothian, writes to say that he lived for 25 years on Marjoribanks Street.

"When asked for my name and address for any reason, my answer always brought a look of disbelief."

"Samuel Marchbanks"

One of Canada's most distinguished writers, Robertson Davies, a novelist, dramatist and essayist with a growing international reputation, created the character "Samuel Marchbanks" as the protagonist of some of his early books.

Samuel, a curmudgeonly but highly articulate critic of the Canadian scene, recorded his observations in three volumes: The Diary of Samuel Marchbanks (1947), The Table Talk of Samuel Marchbanks (1949), and Marchbanks' Almanac (1967).

Mr. Davies did not just pull the pseudonym out of his hat. He borrowed it from some of his ancestors. Acknowledging receipt of his copy of The Marjoribanks Letter, No. 1, he writes, "There is many a Marjoribanks in my father's family tree, and also a lot of Marchbanks".

In the Diary, the fictitious Samuel allows a brief glimpse into his own family history:

"My own ancestors descended upon England from Scotland a century or more ago, pausing at the border only long enough to change their name from Marjoribanks to its present form. I don't imagine that their descendants would want to be herded back to the bleak hillsides from which they escaped after the Great Capercailzie Famine of 1745. Nowadays you won't find a Marchbanks in Scotland even during the grouse season; most of us just do our grousing wherever we happen to be. 'A tussock wowsie's nae doitit,' as Bobbie Burns said, putting the whole thing in a nutshell."

A Marjoribanks Funeral

A glimpse of Marjoribanks family life in the 17th century is provided by the financial accounts of the funeral of Margare, Marjoribanks who died in 1697 at Northfield House, Prestonpans.

The accounts were found among family papers, and a copy was provided by Anne L. Marjoribanks, of Melrose, Scotland.

In total, the funeral expenses amounted to £ 1,975, 18s, 4d, an impressive sum when translated into contemporary currency.

It is not known how many attended the obsequies, but it seems unlikely that anyone went hungry. Three hundred and sixty-four pounds were expended for food, including: 120 pigeons, 88 hens and chickens, 10 ducks, four geese and an unspecified number of turkeys, rabbits and other "fleshes and poultrie."

The guests consumed 76 loaves of bread and "one stone weight of butter."

To wash all this down, the generous hosts spent £ 408 on drink: 56 gallons of ale, 11 gallons of claret, and 77 pints of sack. Fourteen pounds, 10 shillings went to provide guests with pipes and tobacco.

"The vagrant poor", who gather at public events in the hope of largesse, were rewarded to the extent of £ 14, 3s, 6d.

Fourteen shillings were paid to a local tradesman "for sableing (blackening) the door of the room where the Corps lay after the same was put in the coffin". The coffin-maker, Jon Auchinleck, was paid £ 81, 6s.

Mr. Jon Low received £ 6 "for his paines & trouble, being sent late and early for physicians and other occasions concerning the defunct."

Note

If you have information or observations that you think might interest other Marjoribankses, we would be delighted to hear from you. If you know of Marjoribankses who would like to receive The Letter, please send their complete postal addresses. Until the Marjoribanks Society is formally established, The Letter continues to be privately financed. The cost of printing and postage amounts to about \$2.00 a copy in Canadian funds. If you would like to share this cost, your contributions would be gratefully received. Cheques or money-orders should be made payable to The Marjoribanks Letter and sent to:

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